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## 6. A NOTE ON SOME FOOD PLANTS OF THE MALAYAN GIANT SQUIRREL *RATUFA BICOLOR* IN GIBBON WILDLIFE SANCTUARY, JORHAT, ASSAM

The Malayan giant squirrel (*Ratufa bicolor*) is arboreal (Prater 1980). During our studies on plant-animal interaction with special reference to primates of Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS), Assam, we noted some interesting dietary habits of the Malayan giant squirrel. Gibbon WLS is a newly constituted sanctuary situated about 20 km southeast of Jorhat town in upper Assam and lies between 26° 40'-26° 45' N and 94° 20'-94° 25' E. Prior to its declaration as a sanctuary it was a reserve forest under the eastern Assam forest circle. The sanctuary is famous for its diversity in primate species, 7 non-human primate species being found within 19.5 sq. km fragmented forest habitat (Bujarbarua and Chetry 1999). All the records were made between October 1998-September 1999.

*Ratufa bicolor* fed on parts of 37 plant species in Gibbon WLS. Most of the food plants were identified on the spot, the unidentified specimens were collected and later identified in the herbarium of the Botany Department, Gauhati University, with the help of FLORA OF ASSAM (Kanjilal 1940). All the food plants are trees and are listed in Appendix I, with parts eaten by the squirrel.

The squirrel primarily fed on pericarp and sometimes on fruit pulp. In some cases, it consumed the seeds. The squirrel gnaws at the pericarp of the fruits and eats the cotyledons. Insect larvae (mainly those of ants) and small spiders are also eaten.

From our observations, *Ratufa bicolor* is certainly frugivorous. Morton (1973) has noted that among frugivorous birds there may be intense selection pressure, favouring the ability to exploit a wider variety of food in periods of fruit scarcity. The Malayan giant squirrel, which feeds mainly on fruits, probably experiences the same selection pressure, and may take to a broad array of foods during periods of fruit shortage.

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MISCELLANEOUS NOTES

APPENDIX - I

Plant Species	Family	Parts Consumed
1. <i>Mangifera indica</i>	Anacardiaceae	Pericarp
2. <i>M. sylvatica</i>	"	"
3. <i>Drimycarpus racemosus</i>	"	Entire fruit
4. <i>Spondias mangifera</i>	"	Flower/Fruit pulp
5. <i>Bombax ceiba</i>	Bombacaceae	Flower bud
6. <i>Canarium resiniferum</i>	Burseraceae	Entire fruit
7. <i>Garuga pinnata</i>	"	"
8. <i>Terminalia belerica</i>	Combretaceae	"
9. <i>T. chebula</i>	"	Pericarp
10. <i>T. myriocarpa</i>	"	Inflorescence/Flower
11. <i>Tetrameles nudiflora</i>	Datiaceae	"
12. <i>Dillenia indica</i>	Dilleniaceae	Juice of fleshy calyx
13. <i>Vatica lancaefolia</i>	Dipterocarpaceae	Seed
14. <i>Elaeocarpus floribundus</i>	Elaeocarpaceae	Pericarp
15. <i>Sapium baccatum</i>	Euphorbiaceae	Fruit pulp
16. <i>Bischofia javanica</i>	"	Entire fruit
17. <i>Casanopsis indica</i>	Fagaceae	Nut (Seed)
18. <i>Garcinia cowa</i>	Guttiferae	Fruit pulp
19. <i>G. pedunculata</i>	Guttiferae	Fruit pulp
20. <i>Litsea polyantha</i>	Lauraceae	Pericarp
21. <i>Cryptocarya</i> sp.	"	"
22. <i>Duabanga sonneratioides</i>	Lythraceae	Thalamus (ovule)
23. <i>Michelia montana</i>	Magnoliaceae	Pericarp
24. <i>Dysoxylum binectariferum</i>	Meliaceae	"
25. <i>Ammora wallichii</i>	"	"
26. <i>Cedrella toona</i>	"	"
27. <i>Chikrassia tabularis</i>	"	"
28. <i>Artocarpus chaplasha</i>	Moraceae	Juicy ovary
29. <i>A. heterophyllus</i>	"	"
30. <i>Ficus benjamina</i>	"	Entire syconia
31. <i>F. lepidosa</i>	"	"
32. <i>Eugenia jambos</i>	Myrtaceae	Fruit pulp
33. <i>E. jambolana</i>	"	"
34. <i>E. kurzii</i>	"	"
35. <i>Eucalyptus maculata</i>	"	Bark
36. <i>Dendrobium</i> sp.	Orchidaceae	Fruit
37. <i>Anthocephalus cadamba</i>	Rubiaceae	Flower/Nectar

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